

Fishing Tournament Advisory Committee

March 15, 2005

2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Best Western Royale, Stevens Point

Meeting Notes

I. Welcome and Introductions

A. Welcome and introduction of attendees.

Attendees introduced themselves. Present at the meeting were: Mike Hofmann, Wisconsin Bass Federation; Steve Lindahl, Ranger Boats; Brett Staplemann, Wisconsin Bowfishing Association; Bob Miller, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation; Steve Winters, Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance; Bave Blank, Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus; Robert Selk, Trout Unlimited; Ted Lind, Wisconsin Council of Sport Fish Organizations; Warren Zaren, Competitive American Sportfishing Tournaments; Ryan Richards, Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation; Steven Poll, World Walleye Association; Patrick Schmalz, Wisconsin DNR; Mike Staggs, Wisconsin DNR.

B. FTAC status check.

Patrick Schmalz explained that he has been receiving feedback regarding the make-up of the FTAC, most of which is negative feedback. However that negative feedback has been directed at very different aspects. Comments have expressed concern that the FTAC is dominated by ‘tournament folks’ (e.g. anglers, sponsors, industry). They have indicated their feeling that the FTAC should have more representation from ‘general anglers’.

On the nearly polar opposite end of the spectrum, comments have been received suggest that the FTAC is too large and should not include representatives without knowledge some of tournaments. The reasoning cited is that the process would be sped up.

Schmalz expressed his feeling that both points of view have merit, and that the FTAC was created based on the legislative mandate in Act 249 to represent the broad user groups identified in the legislation.

1. Do you know why you are here?

Schmalz recognized that participation on the FTAC is greatly appreciated by the WDNR, and that it is entirely voluntary, understanding if individuals were no longer available to, or interested in, participating. He asked if anyone questioned their selection to serve on the committee. No one present questioned their involvement. Schmalz extended an invitation to either email, call, or write if they have any questions regarding their selection.

2. Do you want to continue to be part of the FTAC?

In addition to suggesting those questioning their selection for the FTAC, Schmalz continued that he wished to have each FTAC member tell him if they still wanted to be part of the FTAC. Schmalz noted that three options existed for current members.

Options included: 1) Continue to participate in all activities of FTAC; 2) Participate only in portions that are of particular interest to you; 3) Discontinue participation in FTAC.

Steve Winters stated that he wishes to continue being part of the FTAC and that his participation to date has been educational for him and has helped him move past initial biases that he brought with him, specifically that tournament anglers generally share the same concern for the resource.

No other comments were made. Again, Schmalz encouraged people to feel free to contact him at any time regarding further participation.

II. WDNR Update (2 hours) – Patrick Schmalz, WDNR

A. Adoption of FH-55-04 Live well standards for boats used by participants in the bass fishing tournament pilot program. –

Schmalz provided an update on the adoption of FH-55-04. At the February NRB meeting, the live well standards rule was adopted. The rule was not adopted in January because the Natural Resources Board (NRB) wanted a study plan for evaluating the pilot program, including a proposal to fund it.

The rule will be sent to the legislature for review. In general, the assembly and senate committees on Natural Resources hold public hearings on DNR rules. Legislative review can take as long as 1.5 months (Presiding officers of the house and senate have 7 working days after receiving the rule from the department to assign to committees; rules may then spend 30 to 60+ days in Standing Committees, during which time hearings may be held). Essentially, we need relatively quick turnaround from the legislature to ensure it is published (e.g. effective) by June 1 (FYI the June 1 deadline assumed 1.5 months).

The rule was assigned to committee by the Assembly and Senate on March 15. Most likely both committees will hold a public hearing. Mike Staggs expressed that he is relatively confident that the rule will be enacted in time for the Elite 50 event slated for mid-June on Lake Wissota.

B. Bass fishing tournament pilot program.

1. Update on 2005 events. – Schmalz noted that there have been some developments with respect to the bass fishing tournament pilot program for 2005.

a) Gander Mountain Series events

Two Gander Mountain Professional Bass Tour events were selected to participate in 2005. Shortly after announcing the 2005 events, Schmalz was contacted by the promoters of the tour and told that Gander Mountain had pulled its sponsorship of bass tournaments in WI and MN, and subsequently canceled those events. That left us with two essentially ‘vacant’ 2005 spots for the pilot program.

b) FLW-Everstart event

An application for the pilot program was submitted by FLW Outdoors for an event scheduled for August 3-6, 2005 on the Mississippi River (WI-MN boundary) out of the LaCrosse area. The recommendation from the FTAC was to make an attempt

to work out boundary water issues with MN, else not include the FLW Everstart event in the pilot, due to concerns regarding regulatory differences between states.

However, FLW subsequently contacted the State of MN, and MDNR has granted an exemption for the FLW Everstart event, under the authority of an experimental regulation.

c) 'Vacant' event.

That still leaves us with one event open for the 2005 bass fishing tournament pilot program. Two other events were reviewed by the FTAC back in December (WSBF State tournament; Casting for a Cure – Madison Chain).

- Mike Hofmann suggested that the department grant the final 2005 permit to the Casting for a Cure event as long as the department oversaw the fish handling and release.
- Schmalz noted that the Madison Chain is a desirable location for a pilot program event, as it frequently hosts tournaments.
- Steve Winters agreed that with department oversight, the event should be offered the permit.
- Steve Lindahl suggested the Bass Fishing League (BFL), which is affiliated with FLW, and has plans to hold 3 events in Wisconsin in 2005. Two of those events are scheduled for the Mississippi River and the third for the Wolf River. These are one day events with 125-150 boats.
- Discussion ensued regarding the events left to choose from not having the potential economic impact targeted by the pilot program. However, finding another event for 2005 that may fit the criteria will be difficult. The new legislation requires the department to issue 4 permits. In 2006, there should be a better chance to get 4 events to fit all the criteria.
- The recommendation for the FTAC was for the department to look into the BFL event scheduled for the Wolf River on June 18 first, and if they are not interested, look into permitting the Madison Chain event.

At this point, Mike Staggs presented information regarding the proposed DNR fee increase package included in Governor's proposed budget. He noted that the FTAC is actively engaged in fisheries management for the state of Wisconsin. He further stated that the tournament legislation provided the unique opportunity to establish tournament fees.

2. Pilot program evaluation.

Schmalz explained that Act 249 requires the department in cooperation with the WSBF to collect data and conduct research to evaluate the bass fishing tournament pilot program.

- a) Study plan – At the request of the NRB a study plan was developed for evaluating the pilot program. Copies of the study plan were provided to each of FTAC members.

The plan consists of 3 major components: 1) Biological impacts (tournament-associated mortality, and the extent of and mortality associated with culling); 2) Economic impacts (economic impact on a local economy that hosts a large event, e.g. the Elite 50, compared to the economic impact generated by fishing the same waterbody; and 3) Sociological impacts (measuring angler attitudes towards tournaments, the pilot program, culling).

The proposal includes contracting some of the work through the UW system (e.g. UWSP to do mortality; UW-Madison to do economics), and some via the Department (sociological study).

Biology - \$45,000

Economics - \$20,000

Sociological - \$10,000

- b) Funding – Of particular concern to the NRB was how the department would pay for the evaluation. The proposed funding mechanism can also be found in the document provided to you. It is as follows:

Reallocated project funds - \$15,000

External funds - \$15,000

Future permit fees - \$45,000

Thus far the department has received a verbal commitment from ESPN/BASS for \$15,000 for 2005. In addition, FLW has committed to contributing \$5,000 and expenditure data. Any funds received above the estimated \$15,000 from external sources will be matched by department reallocation of funds and will reduce the amount to be paid by future tournament permit fees.

- c) 2005 Spring Hearing NRB Advisory Question #28 – An advisory question was added to the 2005 spring hearing questionnaire upon request by the NRB in response the January NRB presentation of the live well standards rule. It asks for public opinion regarding the collection and use of tournament fees. It has already generated some controversy amongst both bass tournament anglers, other tournament anglers and non-tournament anglers. Please keep in mind that this is advisory in nature and non-binding. It is a tool used to gauge public opinion on issues. Utilization of the results depends somewhat on the results of the vote.

3. 2006 Pilot program announcement.

The group discussed the timeline for announcement and selection of bass tournaments to participate in the pilot program in 2006. In 2005, the department simply sent out a press release announcing the pilot program. Our press releases generally reach a relatively small audience (compared to the nationwide tournament audience).

- Schmalz suggested that the department announce the 2006 pilot program in a similar fashion and allow the FTAC members with more experience and better connections to ‘solicit’ events.
- Steve Winters recommended that the department also send the announcement to all 2005 bass fishing tournament sponsors.
- Dave Blank stated that he could provide the announcement to the 30 CVBs in Wisconsin.
- Other suggestions included providing Chambers of Commerce with the announcement.
- Mike Staggs suggested that, in order to avoid getting a large number of applicants, that members of the FTAC solicit particular events.
- The timeline discussed and finalized was:
 - June 1 – Deadline for announcement to be completed and sent to appropriate groups.
 - July 31 – Deadline for applications for 2006 permits.
 - October 1 – Deadline for selection of 2006 tournaments.

III. Fishing tournament rule development

A. Review of Act 249 – rule-making authority

The group began discussions about fishing tournament regulation developments. Schmalz provided a handout of 2003 Wisconsin Act 249 and went through some of the specific authorities in Act 249. These specific authorities should provide guidelines as well as sideboards by which regulations can and should be developed. The FTAC must become familiar with the new legislation.

B. Review of past WDNR tournament rule discussions

Schmalz also provided a handout that contained Wisconsin Administrative Code s. NR 20.40 (current tournament regulations). In addition, in order to provide reference as to where the department and past tournament committees have been, Schmalz provided several old documents consisting of summaries of past activities.

C. Development of priority list for rule-making

1. Develop a plan and timeline for tournament rule development.

The group began discussions by working on the definition of a tournament for the purpose of regulation.

Definition (must meet all requirements currently):

- Competition is the primary intent; AND
- Prizes total \$500 or more in total; AND
- 20 boats or 40 participants; AND
- Waters to be fished are identified by name by the sponsor; AND
- Anglers fish the same dates.

If any of the above are not the case, a permit is currently not required.

The FTAC recommended the following modifications to the definition:

Definition

- Competition is the primary intent; AND
- Prizes total \$500 or more in total; ~~AND~~ **OR**
- 20 boats or 40 participants; AND
- Waters to be fished are identified by name by the sponsor; AND
- ~~Anglers fish the same dates~~ **Tournament dates are specified.**

Next the group began discussion of tournament permit fees.

The first point made was that the fee must at least cover the cost of processing the permits. In addition, it must be used to recover a portion of the costs for the pilot program evaluation. Discussion of specific dollar amounts was abandoned due to lack of information regarding the estimates of administrative costs.

Instead the discussion focused on potential fee structures and the following options were noted and discussed.

Fee structure options:

- Base fee for all permits.
- Base fee + contestant fee (a particular \$ amount per contestant).
- Base fee + tournament stamp (required to be purchased by all tournament anglers).
- Base fee + tournament stamp for bass tournament anglers only.
- Stepped fee structure (based on prize value or number of contestants).
- Stepped fee structure + tournament stamp.

Some specific comments regarding the options:

- **The tournament stamp will not be accepted by some tournament anglers. Particularly it is unfair for individuals who may fish a single event (such as one ice fishing jamboree) to have to purchase a stamp.**
- **Others felt that the stamp was the best idea to collect substantial funds to administer the tournament permit program and would be well accepted by tournament anglers. Those cited the success of the trout stamp.**
- **Many felt that it was important to have differential fees for the ‘little guys’ and the ‘big guys’. Thus favoring the stepped fee structure.**
- **There was a desire to keep the fees structure as simple as possible and not to attempt to incorporate non-profit status into the determination of fees, citing complications with it.**
- **An argument was made to simply take the estimated administrative costs and divide by the expected number of permits and charge that base fee for all permits.**

Schmalz asked the FTAC members present to take the materials (including the surrounding states regulations provided by him) and review them to prepare for the next meeting. He will prepare an estimated cost to administer the program.

OTHER COMMENTS:

- ❖ **Ice fishing jamborees are greatly underestimated because many events that meet the definition of a fishing tournament in current rules do not obtain a permit, either because they do not know or do not care. A suggestion was made to add a page to the fishing regulations pamphlet so that all anglers have easy access to the tournament rules. In addition, the department should make a concerted effort to provide public outreach/education. Also, law enforcement should cite violators.**
- ❖ **A recommendation was to invite a conservation warden to all of the FTAC meetings.**
- ❖ **CAST still has tournament booklets available and is willing to provide workshops for sponsors but would like department support in the form of outreach. Schmalz noted that Act 249 provides authority to require training or educational requirements for individuals to receive a permit.**
- ❖ **The tournament sanctioning program was established for \$10,000. Schmalz expressed the need for the department to ensure that it can support such a program.**

IV. Next meeting – The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for April 16.